

“Forgotten Children: Foster Children Take a Stand!” Statewide GAL Adoption and Foster Care Rallies November 8 - November 14

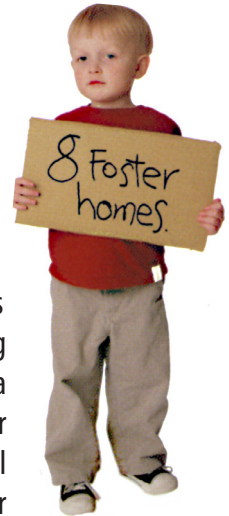
The “Forgotten Children” are life-size cardboard cutouts originally displayed at the National Monument in Washington, DC, May 19-23, 2008. The cutouts represent the over 100 abused or neglected South Carolina children who enter the Family Court system every week. These cutouts will be featured in a series of Adoption and Foster Care Rallies throughout the state.

These rallies, in combination with National Adoption Month, celebrate those children who have found forever homes, and remembers those children who remain in foster care. This event honors the commitment of the Volunteer Guardians ad Litem who advocate for abused children. Volunteers will be holding the cutouts at these events, as a demonstration of the support a volunteer GAL provides to a child throughout their case. The display will help put a face on children who might otherwise be forgotten.

The opening event will take place Saturday, November 8, 2008 from 10am-11am, on the steps of the South Carolina Capitol Building. 104 Forgotten Children cutouts will be held by our volunteers during the ceremony, representing the number of South Carolina children who enter the foster care system every week. We will have a special keynote speaker for the event, and members of the Legislature, Family Court, and other agencies have also been invited to attend and show their support.

The Forgotten Children will then travel to different locations in the state to tell their story. Greenville, Spartanburg, Florence, and Charleston will be hosting local rallies.

We hope that all our volunteers will attend and participate in these events. Please join us to show your support, and help raise awareness in your communities about the plight of foster children. Read more about the Forgotten Children Rallies on page 2.



South Carolina GAL Presents

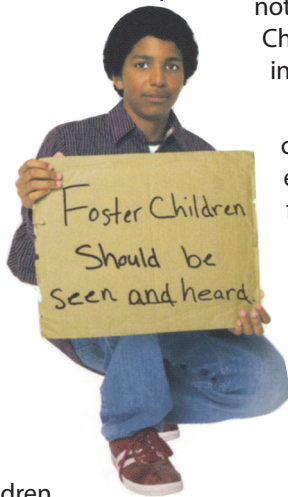


ForgottenChildren

FOSTER CHILDREN TAKE A STAND!

This event, sponsored by National CASA, opened May 19-23, 2008, at the National Mall in Washington, DC. 4,250 cutouts were placed on the lawn in front of the Washington Monument. This represents the number of children who enter foster care in America each workweek. The display made quite an impact, drawing thousands of onlookers, substantial corporate support, and tremendous media attention.

Following the launch of the campaign, Dr. Phil McGraw, syndicated daytime talk show host, and his wife Robin announced their support of this year long campaign and their role as its official spokesperson on the Dr. Phil Show. The first month of their campaign generated a 56% increase in inquiries to CASA. You can read more online about The Forgotten Children Campaign and Dr. Phil's involvement: www.nationalcasa.org/news_events/fc_overview.html or in your current issue of CASA Connections magazine.



The South Carolina Volunteer GAL program is supporting the Forgotten Children initiative through a series of events November 8-15.

The celebration kicks off Saturday, November 8, 2008 on the steps of the South Carolina Capitol Building. All our volunteers are invited to join us and help focus statewide attention on the number of children living in foster care in South Carolina (5,423 as of June 30, 2007). The 104 Forgotten Children cutouts being held by our volunteers during the ceremony will be a powerful reminder that these are children, not just numbers without faces. The Forgotten Children will then travel to different locations in the state to tell their story.

We will be using GAL volunteers to hold the cutouts and assist the programs with these events, so please contact the person listed for each county for more information or to be part of this effort. All GAL's are welcome to participate, regardless of the county for which you volunteer. This is a tremendous opportunity for us to generate statewide media coverage for the children we serve.

The **Greenville GAL Program** will host the Greenville County Adoption and Foster Care Rally on Monday, November 10 at noon in Cleveland Park. A number of adoptions will be finalized in Greenville Family Court on that day as part of the judicial effort supporting National Adoption Month. Contact person is Patty Dellinger, (864) 467-5862.

The **Spartanburg GAL Program** will hold their event Wednesday, November 12, noon at the Spartanburg Court House. Contact person is Jean Bradley, (864) 573-5175.

The **Florence GAL Program** event will be 11am - noon at the Florence City County Complex Building Thursday, November 13. Contact person is Paulette Blake, (843) 669-7940.

The **Charleston GAL Program** will hold their Rally on Friday, November 14 in Hampton Park. Contact person is Charlene Gadsden, (843) 958-4350.



EASTER BUNNY NESTS

This week I had the privilege to share a tradition our Grandmother passed down to my children. We were having our roof repaired by a private contractor. At times his wife and children would drop by to bring Dad a snack. The children were in the yard and they were getting restless. I could see the Mother was getting tired so I went out to help entertain the three young children.

I asked them if they had ever built an Easter Bunny Nest? That got their attention! I helped them pull some weeds which would shape the nest. We found some green grass with tiny flowers. We shaped the grass into a nest and placed it beside the back porch steps. (pine straw can be substituted if you don't have green weeds). Next each child was suppose to pick wild flowers to decorate the nest. I watch their little hands lovingly pick the flowers and gently place them around the nest. It was very lovely when they finished.

I explained to the children if they would put one large carrot in the nest the Easter Bunny would leave them a surprise. Before long I had six Bunny nests and the children couldn't wait to go home and make plans to do this activity on Easter Eve. They had never heard of this and were eager to share this with their peers. Mom and Dad stopped and praised the children and looked at the nest. Family is so important and in this day and age of computer and video games it was so refreshing to see the children outside .

As they were leaving I thought about the days we spent making Bunny Nests, and the joy we experienced on Easter Morning. I have built Bunny Nest with a lot of children over the years and all I had to buy was one large carrot for each nest. My oldest child always left a turnip in his nest. I thought this would be a fun activity to do with any child and I hope other GALs will use it when ever appropriate.

Sue, Volunteer GAL

A PLACE IN THE WORLD

Being a Guardian ad Litem to an infant is hard because they can't tell you their wishes, but those little windows to their souls can tell you everything.

The child I have learned the most from is named Jeffrey. He suffers from hydrocephalus, a condition sometimes know as "water on the brain." He gained only two pounds in his first six months of life. He suffered from neglect and was listed as "failure to thrive" when he came into foster care.

When I first met him, I thought he would never be able to have a part in this world, due to his physical limitations. But being placed in a loving foster home with two dedicated parents has made all the difference in the world. He doesn't see well, but he knows my voice and smiles when he hears me come to visit. I watch his progress as he learns to communicate, and see him acting bubbly and cooing and laughing. Now that he receives regular physical therapy, he has learned to roll over, and exceeded all goals set for him. The foster family is totally devoted, going to countless doctor visits, attending therapy sessions and learning about his disability. My heart feels good that there are people willing to do this for a child, and I wish I could give them an award.

I look forward to my visits with him. As his advocate, I make sure that all his needs are met, and look for any services that can help him and his family. The Friends group in our county purchased a special Bumpo seat with a tray. This seat helps him sit correctly when he eats and plays and helps the curvature he has in his spine.

His first birthday was a special moment, when I saw his face covered in birthday cake, laughing and smiling. Today, a few weeks later, I heard him say "mama" over the phone...now that was a magic moment! He has found his place in the world, and a special place in my heart. We are all richer from sharing his joy.

Diane, Volunteer GAL

A SIMPLE CASE

By Danny Cromer,

Shortly after completing my undergraduate degree at the University of South Carolina in 1980, I went to work in the South Carolina Governor's Office under the Administration of former Governor Dick Riley. I enjoyed my work in the Governor's Office very much, where I learned about virtually every federal program which came into the state. But my role was not really glamorous, even if it was interesting. I knew that to many people across the state I was simply the last signature on a document before they could get their money.

So after a year or so, I decided I wanted to seek some volunteer opportunity which would contribute to my community. I would be remiss if I did not state that I was inspired by my immediate supervisor in the Governor's Office, who at the time volunteered as the President of the local Mental Health Association. I came across a notification from the Richland County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Project seeking volunteers and decided to look into the program. Little did I know the impact this one decision would have on my life.



Daniel Cromer and State Volunteer GAL Director Louise Cooper in Washington, DC for the "CASA Meets Congress" Day.

The Richland County Guardian ad Litem Project was still new, and it is my recollection I was in the second group of volunteers trained. I do vividly remember there was only one other male in my group, which otherwise consisted of about twelve women from ages twenty-one to sixty. At the time I thought the training provided was very thorough, although I am quite sure by today's standards it would appear rather rudimentary.

I am a political scientist by professional training, and I had absolutely zero exposure to child abuse and neglect issues. Needless to say, I was aghast at what I learned in the training sessions. I had no idea whatsoever of the extent of this malady in our society.

Shortly after completion of the training I received a call from the Guardian ad Litem office asking me to accept a case.

To this day I still chuckle to myself when I remember that each case I was asked to accept over the eight years I volunteered was described to me as “a simple case.” None were simple.

The child in this case was at a local safe shelter. I remember with clear recollection how nervous I was driving to the shelter, and even more so once I sat down with the child. True to my training though, I sat there with stoic emotion as this nine year old child described to me how his mother beat him with an electrical cord and cut him with a knife. I maintained this stoicism even as I looked at his wounds, but when I left the shelter I thought I would be physically ill. My first day in court for this child was another gut wrenching experience, primarily because I did not know what to expect. The case ended with the child being united with relatives and treatment for the mother.

Over the years I accepted many cases, some of which were more complicated than others. I am very proud to say that in all those years and all those cases I never, not once, had a judge rule against my recommendation. The responsibility of the Guardian is immense because it is literally a life and death decision which she or he takes before the bench. I never entered it lightly.

There was one case in particular which I carry to this day. The child was twelve years old when the judge appointed me his Guardian and we grew very close over the years. He calls often, as recently as last night, and he will be thirty-two years old this year. The Guardian Director told me at the time “you have him for life” and she was so right.

What I learned in the Guardian ad Litem Program I still use today, even though it has been sixteen years since I served the court. For the past sixteen years I have served as the Legislative Director for Congressman Jim Clyburn in Washington. I am extremely happy in my work and carry my passion for public service here quite keenly, but Capitol Hill can be a brutal place. But when I am confronted with a difficult conversation in trying to negotiate a legislative solution when none of the parties are in agreement, I remember my days as a Guardian ad Litem. There are very few, if any, things in life one will discuss with anyone more difficult than talking to them about taking their children away from them. That remembrance helps me keep my job here in perspective.

Over the years many people have said to me, “Being a Guardian ad Litem must be terribly rewarding.” My response was always the same; “No, it is not rewarding at all. I have cried a river over some of these kids. But it is the most enriching thing I have ever done in my life.”

Daniel L. Cromer, Washington, DC

“MY NAME IS JAMES MONTGOMERY AND I HAVE BEEN A VOLUNTEER GUARDIAN AD LITEM FOR OVER A YEAR. I ENJOY GIVING BACK TO MY COMMUNITY.”

I find it a privilege to be able to work for and play with children who have been subjected to abuse and/or neglect. It is these children who need someone in their life that cares about their experiences. It's rewarding when I walk into the parent's homes, foster home or school setting and the children run up to me and give me a "high five" or warmly greet me by saying "It's Mr. James."

I've long wanted to be a Guardian ad Litem after having many discussions with an individual who has been one for over ten years. It took me a little while because I was concerned about becoming too attached to the children and the emotions of witnessing abuse and neglect of children. I finally took the step needed and was provided in-depth and thorough training to equip me to perform my duties for the children of Sumter County in a caring manner, while trying to be as objective as possible.

When I talk to people about what I do as a Guardian ad Litem, some reply, "that's wonderful", while others remark "it sounds like it could be dangerous at times." I'm eager to let them know that the job is rewarding. I also let them know that I don't think about myself, but I concentrate on the well being of the child or children. I am concerned for the children as they need to be protected from neglect and abuse as much as possible.

I have met with teachers and counselors, attended numerous court hearings, but the best moments for me are spending time with the children. I feel it is my duty and responsibility to give the children hope for the future and play a role in helping them become productive citizens.

James Montgomery, Sumter County Volunteer Guardian ad Litem

We hope you enjoy this month's stories. This issue includes contributions from Summerville, Sumter, Lexington, Anderson, and Pickens counties, as well as a former volunteer now from Washington DC. Thanks to all those who chose to share with us this month. In order to help protect the confidentiality of the children we serve, when your stories directly involve children, we will not print the last names of the volunteers. In addition, the details identifying the children have been changed. We know that you all appreciate how important it is to safeguard the situations and identities of these children, and want this to be a safe way for you to share the feelings you have about being a volunteer Guardian ad Litem. This newsletter funded by a grant from National CASA. www.nationalcasa.org

Send us your story! We are looking for all types of stories about your experiences: a problem you overcame, something special you advocated for a child, or something you'd like to tell people who are thinking about becoming volunteers. You can submit your stories in writing or by email. And, if you want to share but don't want to write, please call me at (864) 878-0807 and I'll interview you on the phone. Please submit your stories to:

*Cherie Walker, Box 414, Pickens, SC 29671
email to: cwalker@oepp.sc.gov*

2008 GAL VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you for your very positive responses to the volunteer survey in the last issue. There were 235 responses returned, and the feedback was extremely helpful to our staff members for future planning. Below are the results of your answers. There were many wonderful comments on the strengths of the program, including:

"The key strength of the GAL program is that it provides an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. The staff is helpful and always available for consultation and problem solving. The staff is always willing to provide resources needed for completing a case."

"In spite of the workload for everyone involved, they continually work together in the best interest of the children in the program. They continue to work with concern and love for the program - but with a sense of humor and a true eye for what is going on in this county."

Questions	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
The GAL Program gives me the ability to make a difference in a child's life.	62%	33.3%	3%	1.3%	0.49%
The GAL Program lets me be an effective advocate for a child.	59.4%	35.9%	4.3%	0%	0.4%
The GAL Program provided me with the initial training I needed to be an effective volunteer.	55.6%	40.2%	3%	0.9%	0.4%
The GAL Program focuses on the best interest of the child: finding safe, permanent homes as quickly as possible	56.4%	32.1%	10.3%	1.3%	0%
The GAL Program provides me adequate and meaningful in service training.	42.3%	42.7%	11.1%	3%	0.9%
The GAL Program provides competent legal representation for me in Court.	56.4%	33.8%	7.3%	2.6%	0%
I have received adequate assistance in preparation for Court and Court reports.	59.4%	31.6%	6.4%	2.6%	0%
I am provided assistance when needed with monitoring and visitations.	48.3%	39.3%	9.8%	2.6%	0%
The staff seeks collaboration with DSS and other agencies when possible.	48.3%	42.7%	6.4%	2.1%	0.4%
The staff is knowledgeable about resources in and out of the county.	50.9%	36.3%	11.1%	1.7%	0%
The staff is helpful and available for consultation and problem solving.	67.5%	28.6%	3%	0.9%	0%
The staff provides me with encouragement and motivation.	60.7%	29.9%	5.6%	2.6%	1.3%
The staff members communicate openly and honestly with me.	65.8%	26.9%	5.1%	2.1%	0%

Hi, SOUTH CAROLINA GALs!

I have been a GAL for 16½ years. During this time period I have lovingly and caringly worked with well over 125 cases of abused children both teens and babies, to try and make a difference in their lives. I read a notice in the newspaper about Guardians and thought that was interesting. At that time, I was working full time at a police department and decided to help in any way I could. After my retirement, I decided to dedicate more time to “giving back” by helping others, namely children.

I take a lot of cases dealing with sexually abused children and drugs, and try to see my cases all the way through, sometimes with convictions. I want the child to know I am there for them, and to let them know that there is someone who cares. I enjoy the smile on a child's face, when they know that they are not going to be hurt any more. And to have a child say “Thank you guardian angel for watching over me” is a very special moment. I love the pictures, little notes (that are sometimes misspelled) and I adore the hugs I get when I see them. I always go the extra mile, when a child is sick, has school problems, or just needs someone to listen to them. I have two cases now where the child is staying in DSS care, so that they can go to college; they couldn't otherwise. I always try and make sure they have the supplies they need and always keep a watchful eye over them in foster care.

I know a lot of people get upset when they are told this is not a paying job, but a volunteer opportunity to help children, but the loving experience is the best reward. I even get school pictures, with that cute little smile, less a front tooth missing, that I can be proud of like they were my own child. I enjoy what I do or I would not have volunteered this long. I even go to graduations, “How cool is that!”

I have a case now where this child has been in eight different foster and group homes, but I haven't given up. I know that there is a place for her and I will find it yet. So hang in there GALs, the children need you!

Wanda, Volunteer GAL



CONGRATULATIONS TO DAVID & SANDRA RANKIN!

They were awarded the 2008 Collective Hands Award at the United Way of Anderson County Volunteer Recognition Celebration. They have been working as a team of volunteer GAL advocates since August 15, 2001.

During 2007, they worked on 5 cases involving 8 abused/neglected children in the foster care system. The 476 hours that this team spent visiting with these children provided them with a consistent person in their life during a period of constant change. This stability and continuity empowers children, and gives them a sense of control over their lives.

The Rankins have demonstrated their concern for these children in countless ways. They have met with school officials when a child was having difficulties in school, attended baptisms, basketball games and track meets. Many times a child's own family members are unable to attend these events, and this team shows how much they care by being there when a special event occurs in their life.